Alternative Geographies for Egyptology in the 21st Century

23-24 October 2025

University of Cambridge
McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research
Seminar Room

An international symposium
organised by Federico Zangani
with the support of the McDonald Institute

ABSTRACT.

Alternative Geographies for Egyptology in the 21ˢᵗ Century.

This conference addresses the need for new and alternative geographies in Egyptology, with a view to questioning how we understand ancient Egypt internally, relationally, and theoretically.

The conception of Egypt as a homogenous, territorial nation-state is not only a modern distortion due to the Eurocentric development of Egyptology, but also the deliberate product of the ancient Egyptian worldview, elite culture, and royal ideology. Alternative geographies are therefore needed in order to achieve a more realistic understanding of ancient Egypt in its complexity and diversity, and Global History may outline three possible avenues for their definition and implementation.

The first, within Egypt, is the analysis of localities, the agency of citizens at the local level, and the networks that localities and citizens formed: this should dismantle the unrealistic notion of the homogeneity of Egypt as a centralized state under the control of the pharaonic monarchy.

The second avenue of research is connectivity: the ancient Egyptian civilization should be reappraised not as a unique and exceptional phenomenon, but as the product of its global interconnectedness across Africa, the Near East, and the Mediterranean, in a "glocal" perspective.

Finally, the third avenue consists of comparative and theoretical research across temporal, spatial, and disciplinary boundaries, regardless of direct connections, which should challenge Egyptological knowledge against place-specific situations across the entire spectrum of world history and human experience.

Such geographies should transcend the pre-established physical and conceptual boundaries of Egypt and enlarge the scope for Egyptological research, so as to explain the concatenation of very specific, local situations with large-scale, global phenomena.

This conference will gather specialists of ancient Egypt, Africa, the Near East, and the Mediterranean, whose work investigates people, places, and the global networks of political and economic power of which pharaonic Egypt was but one component.

The conference is also expected to generate comparanda that may outline additional avenues towards these alternative geographies by engaging with a wide range of data, theories, and methodologies across world history, in order to investigate place-specific situations in Egypt and how they compare with analogous cases across the Near East, the Mediterranean, and Africa, regardless of direct connections.

PROGRAMME.

Thursday, 23 October (Day 1)

9.30-10.　　*Welcome Remarks* (Cyprian Broodbank, Federico Zangani)

10-10.30.　　**Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek** (University of Chicago)
Multiscalar or Networked? Updating Approaches to Communities and Connectivities

10.30-11.　　**Juan Carlos Moreno García** (CNRS France, University of Paris IV-Sorbonne)
Territoriality, Regional Integration, and State Building in the Egyptian Early and Middle Bronze Age

11-11.30.　　Coffee break

11.30-12.　　**Richard Bussmann** (University of Cologne)
Cross-Cultural Comparison in Egyptology: a Subaltern Perspective

12-12.45.　　**Discussion session**. Chair: **Federico Zangani**

12.45-14.　　Lunch break at the McDonald Institute (open to all)

14-14.30.　　**Rafael Laoutari** (University of Cambridge)
Unexpected Encounters: a Cypriot Perspective to Egyptian Connectivity in the Third Millennium BCE

14.30-15.　　**Artemis Georgiou** (University of Cyprus)
Cyprus and Egypt in a 'Glocal' Perspective: Revisiting Egyptian Ceramic Imports in Late Bronze Age Cypriot Contexts

15-15.30.　　**Louise Steel** (University of Wales Trinity Saint David)
Say to the King of Egypt My Brother: *Examining the Relationship between Cyprus and Egypt during the Late 18th Dynasty*

15.30-16.　　**Discussion session**. Chair: **Cyprian Broodbank**.

16-16.30.　　Coffee break

16.30-17.　　**Miriam Müller** (Netherland Institute for the Near East, Leiden University)
Distant but Entangled? Connections between the Early Bronze Age Khabur Triangle and the Middle Bronze Age Eastern Nile Delta

17-17.30.　　**Kevin McGeough** (University of Lethbridge)
Entangled Borders of Debt and Prestige: Reframing the Borders of the Territorial State in Late Bronze Age Ugarit and Iron Age Busayra

17.30-18.　　**Discussion session**. Chair: **Josephine Quinn**.

19.　　*Dinner at Homerton College* (for presenters and discussants)

Friday, 24 October (Day 2)

9.30-10.   **Natasha Rai** (University of Cambridge)
                  Old Kingdom Buhen in Context: Centring Marginalised Networks in Indigenous Landscapes in the Mid-Third Millennium BCE

10-10.30.   **Kate Spence** (University of Cambridge)
                  Agency and Community in New Kingdom Urban Settings at Amarna and Sesebi

10.30-11.   **Rennan Lemos** (Durham University)
                  Envisioning Alternatives to the Colonial State: Comparing the Classic Kerma and Egyptian New Kingdom Expansion in the Middle Nile (1750–1070 BCE)

11-11.30.   Coffee break

11.30-12.   **Sada Mire** (University College London)
                  From Divine Kinship to Divine Kingship: Understanding Power in Northeast Africa from a Common Ideology of Sacred Fertility

12-12.45.   **Discussion session**. Chair: **Paul Lane**.

12.45-14.   Lunch break at the McDonald Institute (open to all)

14-14.30.   **Alice Stevenson** (University College London)
                  Alternative Geographies, Alternative Chronologies

14.30-15.   **Hratch Papazian** (University of Cambridge)
                  The Economic Geography of Old Kingdom Egypt

15-15.30.   **Mohamed Kenawi** (University of Leicester)
                  The Western Nile Delta: New Geographies and the Future of Egyptian Archaeology

15.30-16.   **Discussion session**. Chair: **Judith Bunbury**.

16-16.30.   Coffee break

16.30-17.   **Caterina Zaggia** (University College London)
                  What Does the Protein Say? Palaeoproteomic Insights into Trade, Mobility, and Connectivity in Ancient Egypt and Nubia

17-17.30.   **Federico Zangani** (University of Cambridge)
                  In Search of New Geographies for Egyptology, and How to Operationalize Them

17.30-18.   **Discussion session and closing remarks**. Chair: **Cyprian Broodbank**.

18.   Reception at the McDonald Institute (all welcome)

ABSTRACTS.

Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek (University of Chicago)

Multiscalar or Networked? Updating Approaches to Communities and Connectivities

Connectivities between Egypt and the Levant have often been analysed from the perspective of the Pharaonic state as a homogenous and territorial power driven by economic, political and, in some cases, ideological, motivations. Recent sociological and anthropological studies, however, have emphasised the complexities of connectivities, offering various approaches to help us understand their emergence, maintenance, and impact. This paper explores two such approaches: (1) the multiscalar approach, which considers the nature and dynamics of local, regional, and supra-regional interactions; and (2) the networked approach, which considers the agents, mechanisms and means of connectivities. By drawing on evidence from the first half of the Second Millennium BCE, across periods of both political stability and instability, the paper questions to what extent these approaches may be useful for studying long-distance connections between groups in Egypt and the Levant, as well as their socio-cultural impact. Further, the paper invites considerations of when such groups become 'global' and when we can apply a 'glocal' analysis.

Juan Carlos Moreno García (CNRS France, University of Paris IV-Sorbonne)

Territoriality, Regional Integration, and State Building in the Egyptian Early and Middle Bronze Age

Current interpretations of the political and territorial organisation of ancient Egypt are still heavily indebted to 19th- and early 20th-century historiographic models. According to them, it was taken for granted that Egypt was the first territorial state, characterized by considerable centralization of political power, advanced administrative and bureaucratic practices, and a homogeneous territorial organization, similar to modern nation-states. However, the study of ancient textual sources and a rapidly growing body of archaeological evidence reveals that this view needs significant revision. While pharaonic sources emphasise conflict and hostility toward foreign peoples, other evidence shows that neighbour populations settled inside Egyptian borders and that their collaboration was essential to exploit mineral and animal resources, led commercial missions and guarantee expeditions safety. Regions also diverged in terms of demography and settlement structure and "intensity" of state authority, so their integration in the kingdom obeyed different formulas that reveal a rather pragmatical monarchical approach. Finally, the socio-economic trajectories of some of these regions reveal specific local political agendas that influenced the kingdom's balance of power and may explain the recurrent episodes of centralisation, disaggregation, and differentiated integration in international exchange networks, which followed similar cycles visible in other regions of the ancient Near East.

Richard Bussmann (University of Cologne)

Cross-Cultural Comparison in Egyptology: a Subaltern Perspective

Egyptologists increasingly engage with multiple geographies of knowledge and reveal the epistemic foundations and social contexts of their subject. Cross-cultural comparison is one among a range of important frameworks for studying ancient Egypt. It is widely used in Egyptology but rarely exposed to explicit theorization in Egyptological scholarship, which might explain an oft implicit resistance against the comparative method in the subject. However, if Egyptology is understood as a variety of Area Studies, one that focusses on the past, comparative methodologies should be key for an interpretation of ancient Egyptian society and culture, just as they feature prominently in the definition of anthropology. This paper uses case studies from within Egyptology to discuss a selected range of aspects relating to cross-cultural comparison. Following recent debates in social anthropology a distinction will be made between frontal and lateral comparison. A major question of the paper concerns the representation of subaltern communities as comparative research tends to be driven by systemic and elite-centered views that contribute to marginalizing disempowered groups in the past.

Rafael Laoutari (University of Cambridge)

Unexpected Encounters: a Cypriot Perspective to Egyptian Connectivity in the Third Millennium BCE

Regular contacts between Cyprus and Egypt are materially documented from around the 17th century BCE, reaching their climax in the 'globalised' world of the Amarna letters in the 14th century BCE. For a long time, these contacts were understood as the result of dramatic and punctuated developments associated with the emergence of a 'Secondary State' in Cyprus. More recently, however, the publication of legacy material from cemeteries along Cyprus' north coast has emphasised the rise of social complexity in this part of the island and its active participation in maritime networks operating along the southern Anatolian coast since around 2000 BCE. These networks are currently viewed as disconnected from the Levantine coast and Egypt. This presentation takes a step further back in time and argues, on the basis of material evidence, for the presence of possible direct or indirect contacts between Cyprus and Egypt via the Levantine maritime corridor during the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE. Acknowledging the innovations in transportation, particularly sailing, that developed in Egypt and spread northward during the 3rd millennium BCE, I argue that at least some Cypriot islanders were aware of Egypt and engaged in maritime networks that ultimately linked the two regions. The success of these networks led to diverse internal transformations within Cypriot society, potentially contributing to Cyprus' rising external status and its integral role in Eastern Mediterranean exchanges, including with Egypt.

Artemis Georgiou (University of Cyprus)

Cyprus and Egypt in a 'Glocal' Perspective: Revisiting Egyptian Ceramic Imports in Late Bronze Age Cypriot Contexts

Cypriot connectivity with Pharaonic Egypt has received proportionally little attention, compared to the extensive research on the island's relations with the Aegean and the Levant. The systematic and integrated study of specific material vectors of this connectivity, namely ceramic imports, can offer a particularly valuable line of evidence. This contribution presents an updated overview of two classes of Egyptian imports found in Cypriot contexts of the Late Bronze Age that provide a fruitful lens through which to explore such interconnections: Tell el-Yahudiyeh vessels and Egyptian transport amphorae. The former, comprising small-sized containers for precious commodities, reveal complex pathways of dissemination and appropriation of practices, shedding light on how Egyptian ceramics and their added-value contents were locally integrated into Cypriot practices of consumption and display during the early phases of the Late Bronze Age. The latter, associated with the maritime transport of commodities in bulk, articulate the role of Cyprus as both a consumer and mediator of Egyptian goods, particularly during the latest phases of the period. The comprehensive and contextual study of these two categories in Cyprus not only contributes to the disentanglement of routes of social, economic and symbolic interaction between the two regions, but also to the assessment of how foreign material culture was received, adapted and re-contextualised within the Cypriot setting.

Louise Steel (University of Wales Trinity Saint David)

Say to the King of Egypt My Brother: *Examining the Relationship between Cyprus and Egypt during the Late 18th Dynasty*

This paper examines the development of international connections between Egypt and Cyprus during the Late 18th Dynasty. Drawing upon the rich archaeological record on Cyprus it argues that there was a significant shift in the island's elite international connections at this time. While the island lay within the Near Eastern sphere of influence in the earlier part of the LBA, as exemplified by the adoption of the cylinder seal (Humphrey 2024), by the late fourteenth century the island appears to have moving into the Egyptian cultural orbit, with the Egyptian scarab gradually supplanting the cylinder seal (Smith 2013). Based on finds recovered on Cyprus, two sites stand out for their close ties with Egypt: Hala Sultan Tekke (Fischer 2023) and Enkomi (Steel 2023). While there is increasing focus on Egyptian objects from Cyprus (notably Papasavvas 2018, 2022) there has been little attempt to place them within a wider narrative of Egypto-Cypriot contact, although Humphrey (2022) has attempted situating them within an understanding of Amarna politics and the identification of Alashiya. This paper draws attention to in intriguing horizon of late 18th Dynasty royal and high status objects from a small number of tombs at Enkomi excavated by the

British Museum. These objects – together with a few other named royal objects (Steel 2013: 199-203) – will be the focus of this paper, which aims to provide a more holistic understanding of how and why they reached the site and what they might reveal about Cyprus's role in the shifting diplomatic world of the Late Bronze Age.

Miriam Müller (Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden University)

Distant but Entangled? Connections between the Early Bronze Age Khabur Triangle and the Middle Bronze Age Eastern Nile Delta

The Eastern Nile Delta, especially sites along the Pelusiac Nile branch, which exhibit a distinctly "different" material culture, has long been characterized as un-Egyptian and largely disregarded in traditional interpretations of ancient Egypt. As one of Egypt's borderlands, the Eastern Nile Delta reflects close links in architecture and material culture with the wider Near East. This area served as the first point of contact between migrants and Egyptian culture and civilization. Furthermore, it functioned as a center of trade with the Mediterranean, epitomized by the harbor town of Tell el-Dabʿa, ancient Avaris. The region is thus a prime candidate for exemplifying global networks beyond the traditional view of a monolithic, unified Egyptian state with fixed borders. Focusing on daily life in the city of Avaris, it becomes clear that traditional elements of Egyptian culture existed side-by-side with foreign concepts and traditions. At times, these foreign influences evolved into new expressions, essentially blending Egyptian and Near Eastern customs. In the search for the origins of these foreign elements, and for insights into the identity of the people who settled here and married into local families, the Levant has traditionally been the primary region of comparison. The recently concluded Hyksos Enigma project has proposed yet another possible area of origin, extending the search beyond the Northern Levant to the Upper Mesopotamian plain and the Khabur region. In my lecture, I will outline the already identified similarities between the Khabur Triangle and the Eastern Nile Delta. By adding another small piece to the puzzle, I will discuss what these chronologically and geographically distant connections might signify for the study of one of the most enigmatic periods in Egyptian history, the Hyksos period, and beyond. With this lecture, I hope to contribute to broadening our perspective and deepening our understanding of daily life in one of Egypt's ancient capitals, as well as the far-reaching connections that can often be discerned only in the smallest of details.

Kevin McGeough (University of Lethbridge)

Entangled Borders of Debt and Prestige: Reframing the Borders of the Territorial State in Late Bronze Age Ugarit and Iron Age Busayra

It is tempting to imagine the Bronze and Iron Age Levant as neatly divided territorial kingdoms, with discrete borders, easily drawn on a map, but perhaps shifting based on the imperial incursions of polities like Egypt or the Mesopotamian empires. Yet such clearcut imaginings likely elide the complexities and ambiguities of interconnectedness that was not constructed as a line on a map. Alternative geographies, predicated on other criteria, may better reflect the complexities and messiness of the Bronze and Iron Age Levant. This paper shall explore how debt and prestige relationships created different types of emergent borders and connections, that while mediated by landscapes, where fixed more along nodes and corridors of different forms of patronage relationships. Such borders were not bounded by the perceived territoriality of the state necessarily so much as the extent of juridical authority, conspicuous elite emulation, and flow of resources. Nor are these relationships confined by the adjacency of physical space so much as where social-political connectedness can become manifest. Using two case studies centered on major urban locales, Late Bronze Ugarit and Iron II Busayra, this paper offers new ways of imagining the boundaries of the Ugaritic and Edomite polities and how these polities fit, or did not fit, within the borders of larger proximal polities.

Natasha Rai (University of Cambridge)

Old Kingdom Buhen in Context: Centring Marginalised Networks in Indigenous Landscapes in the Mid-Third Millennium BCE

The minimal archaeological footprint of nomadic pastoralists has historically justified the marginalisation of entire landscapes and the communities and socio-political and economic networks that connected them. Whilst limited archaeological visibility prevents the physical mapping of these networks, theoretical

frameworks that centre Indigenous perspectives through the lens of Traditional Knowledge, theorised through pastoral ethnographies, historical colonial studies and premodern globalization theories, can centre marginalised landscapes within broader globalizing interconnections. Situated close to the Second Cataract of the Nile, the Old Kingdom site of Buhen preserves the earliest intersection between the Egyptian State and the traditionally marginalised Indigenous landscapes of Lower Nubia. This paper recontextualises the site within both the Egyptian and Nubian landscapes to reveal extensive Indigenous interconnections and changing socio-political relationships, wherein the Egyptian state participated as an equal component.

Kate Spence (University of Cambridge)

Agency and Community in New Kingdom Urban Settings at Amarna and Sesebi

Hierarchical social relationships are well attested in planned and self-organised Egyptian urban settings at sites such as Lahun and in the Amarna Main City and Workmen's Village. This paper, by contrast, examines evidence for household agency and the negotiation of relationships between households in non-hierarchical social contexts in Egypt and in colonised Nubia. It also considers the dynamics visible in urban settings when unequal social relations emerge.

Rennan Lemos (Durham University)

Envisioning Alternatives to the Colonial State: Comparing the Classic Kerma and Egyptian New Kingdom Expansion in the Middle Nile (1750–1070 BCE)

The ancient history of the Nile valley is dominated by narratives based on the centrality of the ancient Egyptian state and its dominant logic of power, imposition and control, a pattern established as early as the Early Dynastic Period and reproduced throughout ancient Egypt's dynastic periods. Ideology, bureaucracy, taxation and the expropriation of resources generated by the working majority were central to the state's logic, while deviations to such logic were met with force: plenty of evidence for punishment and colonisation, both internal and external, represent the essence of the state's modus operandi. While it remains difficult to envision alternatives based on sources produced within the state's structure, I propose an imaginative exercise to allow us to both decentre the state as the primary driving force of social continuity and change in the ancient Nile valley and visualise alternative to the state's imposed social structures. By examining the phenomenon of state expansion through a comparison of the Classic Kerma's expansion and the Egyptian New Kingdom colonisation of Nubia, I aim to unveil alternative ways in which the state societies of the Nile valley operated, particularly in relation to local communities. If imposition and expropriation leading to the impoverishment of local communities characterised the way the ancient Egyptian state behaved towards local communities internally and externally, by looking at Kerma we can envision alternatives to the Egyptian rule. Contrasting Classic Kerma provincial cemeteries north of the Third Cataract and Egyptian colonial non-elite cemeteries in Nubia reveals strikingly different patterns of engagement between states and local communities. This comparison also allows us to envisage other possible ways of living under ancient expanding states, with crucial theoretical implications for how we write the history of human experience in the ancient Nile valley.

Sada Mire (University College London)

From Divine Kinship to Divine Kingship: Understanding Power in Northeast Africa from a Common Ideology of Sacred Fertility

State power relies on ideology for legitimacy. In order to expand the study of Ancient Egypt we need to expand our understanding of its affinities and connections with the wider region of northeast Africa. In this paper, I focus on the ideology of sacred fertility in northeast Africa. I have elsewhere (Mire, 2020), discussed how this ideology is fundamental to the existence of humans, crops, and animals and that through the ages a set of rituals have emerged that transcend one group or nation and intertwine the communities of northeast Africa for millennia. Here, I want to suggest that the notion of divine kingship in the Nile Valley is associated with the northeast African concept of sacred blood. The idea that a pharaoh is a living god is linked to this wider notion of sacred blood. The notion of sacred blood is fundamental to divine kinship in this region. We have to ask why sacred blood is important. We also have to ask why divine kingship is important for Ancient Egypt. A sacred genealogy justifies power and ensures continuance of control over resources. The ultimate power is that which takes God not just as a source but is God. Here complex and

elaborate consecration rituals are needed and specially fertility rituals for not only keeping the blood sacred but also for extending the divine lineage. I will discuss northeast African consecration and fertility rituals, some starting before birth, and continuing after death.

Alice Stevenson (University College London)

Alternative Geographies, Alternative Chronologies

Dating is integral to the project of understanding global interconnectedness across Africa, the Near East, and the Mediterranean. Thus, although this conference is about alternative geographies, I argue it requires critical reflection on alternative chronologies, their social relevance and their role in generating particular narratives of change. However, archaeological constructions of time - and consequently narratives of change - are one of the more under-theorised areas in Egyptian archaeology. To highlight some of these general issues, I will return to theorising the nature of relative and absolute chronologies for Predynastic Egypt and their social relevance in the context of burial ritual. To do so I examine the role of 'core objects' of marl clay (wavy-handled pottery) in negotiating time and space in the period between 3450 and 3325 BC (Naqada IIC-D) touching on the wider significance of these for local and inter-regional comparison.

Hratch Papazian (University of Cambridge)

The Economic Geography of Old Kingdom Egypt

The concept of Economic Geography can serve as a useful vehicle for analysing, in amalgamated and inter-related fashion, a range of features pertaining to the socio-economics of Old Kingdom Egypt. This paper will explore economic patterns and processes in the third millennium by evaluating the concentration of economic activity and the interaction within and between the dominant and subsidiary sectors of the economy. Spatial and demographic dimensions, which represent pivotal elements for determining economic scale, will form the basis of the arguments and will assist in highlighting the multiple networks operating in the system even in the earliest historical periods. Such an exercise might reveal much about the limitations of the oft-discussed economic centralisation, which were primarily geographic given the expansive landmass of Egypt, a reality that is sometimes overlooked in scholarship. Conversely though, as will be discussed, a false disjunction between the lack of centralisation and a lack of royal territorial sovereignty should be avoided.

Mohamed Kenawi (University of Leicester)

The Western Nile Delta: New Geographies and the Future of Egyptian Archaeology

Since 2012, a multidisciplinary project has undertaken excavations and a comprehensive study programme at two of the largest Graeco-Roman sites in Beheira Province, part of Alexandria's hinterland. It remains the only long-term initiative devoted exclusively to this region, now extending over 13 years of systematic research at Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit. Despite this progress, the chronology and development of the Western Nile Delta remain poorly understood, as most previous investigations have been limited to surveys or shallow explorations. The region, often overlooked due to its scarcity of papyri and inscriptions, nonetheless holds considerable potential for reshaping our understanding of ancient Egypt. This paper presents recent results from the project, addressing methodological challenges of dating, reassessing phases of occupation and abandonment, and considering the significance of the Delta for reconstructing the lives of both elite and non-elite communities beyond the scope of textual sources.

Caterina Zaggia (University College London)

What Does the Protein Say? Palaeoproteomic Insights into Trade, Mobility, and Connectivity in Ancient Egypt and Nubia

Palaeoproteomics refers to the study of ancient proteins preserved in archaeological materials. Closely connected to Egyptology since its inception, the field traces its origins to Boyd's pioneering 1937 analysis of more than 300 Egyptian mummies. Over the past decades, palaeoproteomics has developed into a rapidly expanding discipline at the intersection of molecular biology, palaeontology, archaeology, paleoecology, and history. Its methods generate highly detailed data that illuminate the complex relationships between past societies and the environments they inhabited. Today, it is an invaluable tool for cultural heritage and archaeological research, offering unique insights into the composition of artefacts while expanding our

understanding of ancient technologies, practices, and interactions. A wide variety of materials—ranging from painting binders to organic additives in mortars and ceramics—have been analyzed. Research has largely focused on recovering, identifying, and characterizing macromolecules long after their natural lifespan, even in cases where they have been substantially altered by taphonomic forces acting over centuries, millennia, or even millions of years. Yet the potential of palaeoproteomics extends well beyond species identification. What more can these proteins reveal about the past? This study explores the use of palaeoproteomics as a proxy for trade, mobility, and connectivity in the ancient world. Drawing on two case studies—funerary coffins from the Third Intermediate Period in Egypt and cosmetic kohl from Nubia—we demonstrate how animal-derived proteins provide new evidence for resource circulation, cultural practice, and interregional interaction. More broadly, these examples highlight the power of palaeoproteomics to address questions of exchange and connectivity that lie at the heart of archaeological inquiry.

Federico Zangani (University of Cambridge)

In Search of New Geographies for Egyptology, and How to Operationalize Them

This conference demonstrates many ways in which Egyptology may be provided with new geographies: spatially, methodologically, theoretically, and comparatively. In this concluding presentation, I will outline which new geographies I pursue in the implementation of Egyptological research on global connectivity, and how I operationalize them. Contrasting patterns of connectivity emerge between the Levant – where Egypt made several attempts at empire-building – and Cyprus – where it did not. Thus, I argue that new geographies require a shift away from imperialism and diplomacy, which imply a primarily institutional agency, to globalization, which subsumes a broader range of dynamics, including commercial, non-institutional, and alternative forms of exchange and communication. Differences in the availability of data and in the nature of the evidence – e.g., textual, material, iconographic, etc. – produce an uneven geography of connectivity, both specially and temporally, and demand a plurality of philological and archaeological approaches. Methodologically, comparativism proves highly valuable because it permits the analysis of place-specific situations and local dynamics, in addition to – or even in the absence of – direct connections. Ugarit, for example, is best understood in its own terms as a globally connected urban centre, as opposed to a vassal entertaining relations with imperial powers. Thus, a comparative approach to Ugarit that elucidates its distinct characteristics in relation to Egyptian comparanda constitutes a more productive geography for Egyptological research on global connectivity. My second case-study is Cyprus: while Egyptology remains dominated by a royal perspective based on textual and monumental evidence primarily from religious and funerary contexts, Cyprus is unique in its absence of evidence for kingship and political power. As a result, Cyprus might allow a clearer and more realistic view of power, territoriality, and connectivity, and it may offer a contrasting view with Egypt, where power dynamics were concealed by the monumental expression of kingship in writing and iconography.